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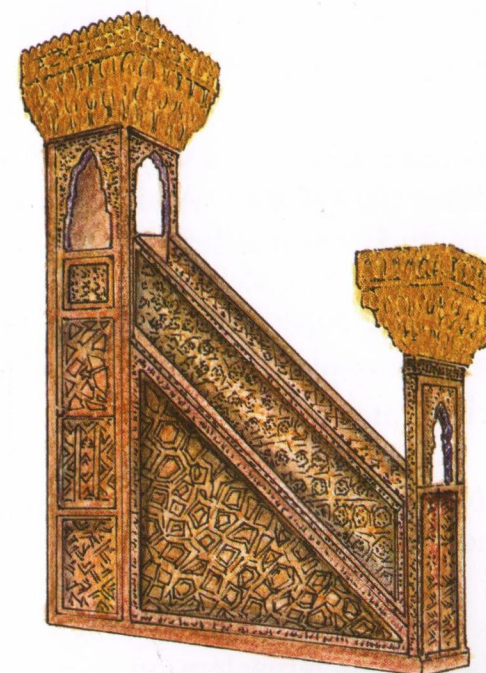
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The Most Beautiful MINBAR



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INTRODUCTION

Jerusalem -- or *Bayt al-Muqaddas* (the 'Sacred House') -- has been important to Muslims since the early days of Islam. Both the Noble Qur'an and authentic *hadith* make reference to the Holy City.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was transported from Makkah to Jerusalem from where he ascended to the Seven Heavens. These events, known as *Al-Isra'* and *Al-Mi'raj*, feature in the following *ayah*.

Glory to Allah who did take His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque [in Makkah] to the Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem, *Al-Quds*] whose precincts We did bless. (*Al-Isra'*: 1)

And in a well-known *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ clarified the importance of Jerusalem.

The Prophet ﷺ was once asked by a woman: 'O *Rasul Allah*! Give us a ruling as to Jerusalem (*Al-Quds*).' And he said: 'It is the land of the Resurrection and the Judgement assembly. For indeed a prayer there is worth a thousand elsewhere.'

Bayt Al-Muqaddas is also the only place on Earth where all the Prophets of Allah ﷺ performed *salah* (ritual prayer) in congregation.

With just one exception, Muslims have been the custodians of the Holy City for the past 1,300 years. In the long history of Jerusalem, two exemplary instances of tolerance need repeating. In both cases, Muslims exhibited restraint, kindness and compassion towards those defeated. First, in 638 CE, after the Caliph 'Umar ﷺ had peacefully entered Jerusalem on foot, all inhabitants of the city were given protection and the freedom of worship. In 1099 CE, however, Jerusalem fell to the invading *Franji*, or 'Franks' (Catholic crusaders from Western Europe) who showed no mercy whatsoever to its Muslim, Jewish, or even Orthodox Christian inhabitants. Many were burned or slaughtered in their places of worship. But almost ninety years later, in 1187 CE, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi liberated Jerusalem and, in stark contrast to the sheer barbarism of the crusaders, was tolerant and merciful to all.

Since the advent of Islam, Muslim leaders have been very generous in endowing *Bayt al-Muqaddas* with fine new buildings or in refurbishing and embellishing older ones. Both the *Qubbat as-Sakhra* ('Dome of the Rock') and the *Masjid al-Aqsa* were built during the first century *hijrah* by Umayyad caliphs from Damascus.

This book relates the true and fascinating story of the creation, installation, destruction, and eventual rebirth of the magnificent pulpit (*minbar*) of the Al-Aqsa Mosque from which each week the *khatib* (sermon reciter) would deliver his address. Salah al-Din had to wait twenty years before he could enter Jerusalem and install the *minbar* of Nur al-Din Zangi in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. And eight hundred years later, *Dar al-Islam* had to wait almost forty years for a new *minbar* to replace the original one destroyed by vandalism.

Every nation treasures its culture, reflected partly in its fine arts and architecture. Islamic culture -- as this book clearly shows -- is as rich and varied as any in the history of mankind and is still alive and well in the 21st century. By the 9th and 10th centuries CE, beautifully-crafted *minbars* became prominent components of all large mosques from Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) to the borders of China. The outstanding artistic achievements of traditional Muslim craftsmen are all on display today in the replica of the magnificent wooden *minbar* of Nur al-Din Zangi.

Insha'Allah, this story of the Al-Aqsa *minbar* will both educate and inspire its readers. For the purpose of worship, the Prophet ﷺ admonished all Muslims to travel to only three mosques: the *Haram* in Holy Makkah, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in *Bayt al-Muqaddas*. The author prays for the day when Muslims the world over can freely pray in the Al-Aqsa Mosque and can listen to a Friday sermon delivered from the most beautiful *minbar*.

Luqman Nagy
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
November 22, 2008

This book is dedicated to my dear Turkish friend, the *kündekâri* master Mevlüt Çiller, whose skillful work adorns Al-Aqsa's new *minbar*.

The city of Jerusalem is sacred to Muslims, Christians and Jews alike. It has a very ancient history and along with neighbouring Jericho (*Ariha*) to the east, may be one of the oldest continuously-inhabited regions on earth.

The walled city of Old Jerusalem today is dwarfed by the bustling, modern suburbs to the west. However, for centuries, the entire city was contained within its sturdy defence walls, the present ones dating from the time of the Ottoman sultan Sulayman (r. 1520-1566 CE). At the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Jerusalem was a tiny Byzantine outpost still trying to recover from the devastating massacre by the Persians in 614 CE. The two magnificent domed buildings one sees today within the walled city both date from the first century *hijrah*.

For Muslims, Jerusalem -- known in Arabic as *al-Quds al-Sharif* -- has a very special significance. It was the site of the first *qiblah*. Also, in about the year 620 CE, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was transported from the Ka'bah in Makkah to Jerusalem. His 'Night Journey' (*al-Isra'*) continued when he ascended (*al-Mi'raj*) to the Seven Heavens, where he received the command to pray five times a day. And the Prophet ﷺ himself said in a well-known *hadith*: "Journeys should not be taken [with the intention of worship] except to three mosques: the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; my Mosque in Madinah; and *Masjid al-Aqsa* in Jersusalem."

In the year 638 CE, six years after the death of the Prophet ﷺ, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ؓ, the second Caliph, entered Jerusalem which peacefully surrendered to him. The Byzantine Patriarch, Sophronius, offered 'Umar ؓ the keys to the city and then accepted the 'Umariyyah Covenant (*al-Uhda al-Umariyyah*) guaranteeing the rights of the non-Muslim inhabitants of Jersusalem. The Covenant begins ...

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent. This is what the servant of Allah, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the *Amir* of the Believers, has offered the people of *Illyaa' al-Quds* (i.e. Jerusalem) of security granting them *amaan* (protection), for themselves, their money, their churches, their children, their lowly and their innocent, and the remainder of their people. Their churches are not to be taken; nor are they to be destroyed; nor are they to be degraded or belittled; neither are their crosses or their money; and they are not to be forced to change their religion; nor is any one of them to be harmed.



The *Qubbat as-Sakhra* (the 'Dome of the Rock') is a beautiful octagonal structure. Its gold covered dome covers the large rock from which the Prophet ﷺ began his *Mi'raj*. It is the first important building in the history of Islamic architecture.



Throughout history, Muslims, remembering the Prophet's ﷺ *hadith*, have always longed to visit Al-Aqsa. And this was always possible except for the eighty-eight year long crusader occupation of Jerusalem in the 12th century CE.

al-Sulami, foresaw the dangers of the European incursions into the Muslim world and linked them to similar ones occurring at the same time in Al-Andalus and Sicily.

Al-Sulami lectured in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus until his death in 1106 CE. In his famous book, *Kitab al-Jihad*, he was the first to rebuke Muslims for neglecting *jihad* in their lives. Allah had punished the Muslims for abandoning many religious duties and had permitted the crusading Franks (Europeans) to succeed.

According to Al-Sulami, Muslims must first wage the 'inner *jihad*', or 'greater *jihad*' (*al-jihad al-akbar*) against the *nafs* ('lower soul') before attempting the 'lesser *jihad*' (*al-jihad al-asghar*) against the infidels. In his words: "First, give precedence to the *jihad* of your selves over the *jihad* against your enemies."

The recapture of Jerusalem by the crusaders in 1099 CE was a very bloody one and was in stark contrast with Umar's ﷺ peaceful entry into the city almost five centuries earlier. Muslims sheltering in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jews seeking refuge in their synagogues, and Orthodox Christians living in the city were slaughtered -- almost to a man. The Christian beatitude of 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' was apparently forgotten in the wanton killing and mayhem the crusaders brought to the Holy City.

Several of the sole survivors of the Jerusalem massacre fled to Damascus where they related their painful story to the *qadi* (grand judge) Abu Saad Al-Harawy. On the following Friday, the *qadi* went bare-headed and dressed in black to the mosque. He proceeded to mount the *minbar* and in full view of the congregation, began to eat some bread. As it was Ramadhan, everyone was shocked and before being arrested, he shouted to the gathered Muslims: "*Jihad* to regain Jerusalem is more of a religious duty than praying and fasting in Ramadhan!" Al-Harawy later proceeded to Baghdad where he received little more than tears from the reigning 'Abbasid caliph.

Unfortunately, the wise message of *faqih* Al-Sulami and *qadi* Al-Harawy was not heeded until much later, when in the 12th century CE, Nur al-Din Zangi and Salah al-Din both took the concept of *jihad* seriously and led successful campaigns to rid *Dar al-Islam* of European invaders. The term *jihad* now became equated with 'national liberation' -- a war of self-defense against foreign occupation and domination.

Comprehension Questions

Now, you can test your knowledge of this story by answering the following questions.

Section 1: page 6

1. What is so special about the cities of Jerusalem and Jericho?
2. When and by whom were the current defence walls of Old Jerusalem built?
3. What was Jerusalem like during the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ?
4. What is one name of Jerusalem in Arabic?
5. What happened to the Prophet ﷺ in about the year 620 CE?
6. What did the Prophet ﷺ say about making journeys to mosques?
7. Who peacefully entered Jerusalem in 638 CE?
8. Who was Sophronius and what did he give 'Umar ؓ?
9. What was the 'Umariyyah Covenant and who accepted it?
10. How had 'Umar ؓ entered Jerusalem?
11. Where did 'Umar ؓ want to be taken?
12. What saddened 'Umar ؓ?
13. What did 'Umar ؓ and many Companions ؓ proceed to do?
14. What is the Arabic name for Mount Moriah?
15. What did 'Umar ؓ build close to the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque?
16. Who was 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and what did he commission?
17. What was the first important building in the history of Islamic architecture?
18. What building was completed in 705 CE?
19. Why did the Al-Aqsa Mosque need rebuilding?
20. How old is the present version of the Al-Aqsa Mosque?
21. Who was the caliph Al-Zahir?
22. When was it not possible for Muslims to visit Al-Aqsa?
23. What event occurred in 1187 CE?
24. Until 1967 CE, what did many Muslims traditionally do?
25. What is the Al-Aqsa Mosque suffering from today?

Section 2: page 9

1. What happened in the year 1099 CE?
2. What was one result of the crusaders' capture of Jerusalem?
3. What shameful event occurred in 1009 CE?
4. What was the *reconquista*?
5. What pivotal event occurred in 1071 CE?
6. Who was Alexius Comnenus and why did he appeal to the Catholics for help?
7. What were the crusades?
8. What was the initial intention of the crusades? What did they degenerate into?
9. Why did European Christians join in the crusades?
10. What happened to the crusading spirit?
11. Who authorized the crusades and what was frequently done?
12. When did the Jerusalem Crusades begin and end?
13. How do some historians regard the crusades?
14. What do some Western historians often claim?
15. Who was 'Ali Ibn Tahir Al-Sulami?
16. Where did Al-Sulami live and work?
17. What famous book did Al-Sulami write and why is it important?
18. According to Al-Sulami, why had Allah punished the Muslims?
19. What did Al-Sulami think about *jihad*?
20. How was the crusader recapture of Jerusalem different from 'Umar's ؓ entry into the city?
21. In 1099 CE, what happened to most Muslims, Jews and Orthodox Christians living in Jerusalem?
22. What Christian beatitude did the crusaders seem to forget?
23. To what city did some of the only survivors of the Jerusalem massacre flee?